

28 December 1986

WASHINGTON

James Reston

**Reagan's
Happy
New Year?**

WASHINGTON

Everything looks the same in Washington now, shining in the winter sun, but in a way things are quite different. It's not only a New Year approaching but a new prospect for all the main characters on this political stage.

The 100th Congress will be different when it convenes in January dominated by the Democrats, with new chairmen of the committees and a new Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The White House will be different with a new National Security Council and new problems with the budget, the allies and the Soviet Union. Suddenly, the fads and follies of the past are over.

The question now, at the turn of the year, is how everybody here will react to this new situation — particularly President Reagan, going into the last two years of his Administration and wondering what he'll leave behind.

Will he come to terms with the failures of his illusions in the coming year — now that the magic is gone — and work for compromises on control of the Federal budget and the nuclear arms race, or will he stick to his dreams of borrowing and spending to put weapons in outer space?

This we don't know, as President Reagan goes into the hospital at the beginning of his 76th year and thinks about what he will say in his State of the Union Message at the end of January.

As usual, he is being advised by some of his old California buddies never to complain, never to explain and never to apologize — the old Central Intelligence Agency motto — to stick it out, use his veto against the Democrats in Congress and go out fighting.

This, it seems, is the Irish view of Don Regan and Pat Buchanan in the White House — declare Lieut. Col. Oliver North a "national hero" and fire him; toss Vice Adm. John Poindexter overboard, and condemn the Republicans for not supporting facts coming out of the White House that they didn't know about.

But there are other voices here in the Reagan Administration. For example, George Shultz at the State Department is saying let's leave bad enough alone and try to work things out with the Congress, the allies and even with the Russians, who are in even more trouble than we are.

The new Speaker of the House, Jim Wright of Texas, and even the new Majority Leader in the Senate, Robert Byrd of West Virginia, are in the old mold of Sam Rayburn of Texas and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan who differed on home policies but believed that foreign policy really "stops at the water's edge."

There's a vague feeling here now, on both sides of the political aisle, that maybe our domestic and foreign policy problems are too serious to be left to partisan politics and personal ambition.

A new generation of politicians is already out in Iowa and New Hampshire thinking, not about Ronald Reagan's problems but about how they might replace him. You can hardly miss a typewriter out of the House or Senate press galleries these days without hitting some dreamer who hears "Hail to the Chief" in the night.

But the problem at the beginning of 1987 is not really how to replace Ronald Reagan but how to help him and the country through the next two years.

This will probably require, not primarily what President Reagan and chief of staff Don Regan or Colonel North or Admiral Poindexter did — important as this is, we can leave it to the historians and the psychiatrists — but how to get on to the end of the century.

For one thing, it would probably be helpful if the President's cabinet and his White House staff stopped fussing with one another, and the new National Security Council under Frank Carlucci got out of the cloak and dagger business and left a little more room for the conduct or misconduct of foreign policy to the professionals who have spent their lives studying all these tangles.

But probably nothing important will be done about all these questions of domestic or foreign policy unless the President comes back from the hospital in the new year with a different approach about how to organize his Administration in the short time he has left.

He retains the support and affection of the American people, though not as much now as before. Much, therefore, will depend on how President Reagan foresees the future when he makes his State of the Union Message at the end of next month. □